DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 109 EA 023 481

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TITLE The Principal: Leader or Manager?
PUB DATE Jun 91
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (Kingston, Ontario, June 2-5, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Responsibility; *Occupational Information; *Principals

ABSTRACT

Various descriptions of the principal's role exist. They include being an instructional leader, a manager, an administrator, or a supervisor. This paper presents a view that the role of the principal is not one that includes both instructional leadership and school site management. Two distinct schools of thought within educational administration theory are examined. The first is the positivistic school that attempts to provide administrators with strategies and methods that help them to develop more efficient and effective organizations. The alternative view attempts to teach administrators to be more reflective and artful in their administrative role by developing the organization as a reflection of the realities of the employees. From these two perspectives, the role of leadership and management is examined. Principals can be effective as managers, but the constraints of the work environment limit their effectiveness as instructional leaders. Five clusters of situational obstacles which constrain a principal's actions are detailed. They include constraints from teachers, from the principal's role, and from board-level administration. (33 references) (RR)

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# The Principal: Leader or Manager?

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A paper presented at the Annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Kingston, Ontario, June 1991.

EA 023 481

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

In this time of economic recession when managers in many business and government sectors are facing lay-offs, the ubiquity of newspaper advertisements inviting educators to apply for vacated educational administrative positions may be symptomatic of serious problems inherent in the position. Are school administrators dissatisfied with their jobs? Could the problem be that no one really understands what the role of the principal "ought" to be? As society places more demands upon the school system and as both students and teachers change, is it time to re-define the role of the principal?

Various descriptions of the principal's role exist. Bezeau (1989) describes a principal as the manager and the instructional leader of the school. Webster's (1981) dictionary defines the principal as being "a person who has controlling authority or is in a position to act independently: one who has a leading position or takes the lead" (p. 1802). Section 175 of the Saskatchewán Education Act (1978) defines the responsibilities of the principal as follows:

> A principal under the supervision of the director or the superintendent, shall be responsible for the general organization, administration and supervision of the school, its programs and professional staff and for administrative functions which pertain to liason between the school and the board and its officials.

Thus, reflecting on these descriptions, one might say that a school principal is an instructional leader and a manager who has controlling authority and acts independently under the supervision of the director/superintendent in liason with the school board. Does this description, in fact, describe the role of a principal? Is it possible to be in control and simultaneously be under the supervision of external actors? Do principals in practice act independently? Are principals instructional leaders, school site managers, or are they both instructional leaders and managers? This paper presents a view that the role of the principal as defined by provincial legislation, as described by many writers (Bezeau 1989; Deal, 1987; Gronn, 1983; Lightfoot, 1983; Morris et al, 1984; Metz, 1978; Smirich & Morgan, 1982; Watkins, 1986; Wolcott, 1973) and as practiced by most principals is not one that includes both instructional leadership and school site management. Because principals must function within the constraints of the workplace, their role is more appropriately one of management.

## Educational Administration Theory: Management versus Leadership

Two distinct schools of thought have emerged within educational administrative theory. The positivistic school attempts to provide administrators with strategies and methods that help them to develop more efficient and effective organizations. Based upon empirical research, generic theories have been formulated by researchers to provide practitioners with the necessary analytical skills to enable them to make rational, informed decisions so that organizational goals can be achieved efficiently and effectively. Through their training and inservicing, principals are given a "panoramic view" of "organizing, workflow, authority and power systems, leadership, control, coordination, planning, change, administrative behavior, group behavior, human adaptation, motivation, decision-making and so on" (Sergiovanni & Carver, 1973, p. 2).

The alternate school of thought attempts to teach administrators to be more reflective and artful in their administrative role. The focus is on understanding and developing the people in the organization which, in turn, is believed to develop the organization as a reflection of the realities of its employees. The

leadership role becomes one of binding the people within the organization so that they all willingly 'move in a Westerly direction' while at the same time they are encouraged to advance and share their own personal visions, beliefs and values. The intellectual heritage of this school of thought includes symbolic interaction, cultural anthropology, phenomenology, normative discourse, hermeneutics, and critical theory (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986).

Within the dichotomy of the two schools of thought, the tenuous separation of the role of leadership and the role of management has occurred. Management is described as being an orientation for action and is based on a "how to" philosophy which takes the form of a science of administration. Thus, management has become associated with positivistic administration theory. Leadership, in contrast, is described as being a reflective and ethical practice in that it is perceived to focus on the people within the organization and the culture created by the actors involved. Its foundations reside in administration as a reflective art.

The art of leadership includes the "reworking of human and technological materials to fashion an organism that embodies new and enduring values" (Selznick, 1957, p. 153). Leadership involves building an identity for

both the employees and the organization, increasing understanding both inside and outside the organization, and making the work of others more meaningful (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986). Bennis (1989) suggests that leadership is the creation of meaning. Pondy (1978) adds that leadership is not simply changing the behavior of subordinates, but also involves giving meaning to their behavior. Leadership means inspiring others to "make music" by creating meaning for their interpretations and then providing the framework for group participation so that all can contribute to the achievement of the goal. Murphy (1988) suggests leadership simply means working hard to make others successful and then giving them the credit.

In contrast, management is concerned with controlling behavior and promoting effectiveness so that organizational goals can be achieved in the most efficient mannner (Greenfield, 1988). March (1986) describes management activities as, "talking to people about minor things, making trivial decisions, holding meetings with unimportant agendas, and responding to the little irritants of organizational life" (p. 22). Management means working to maintain the status quo and does not involve a responsibility to revivify the purposes of the organization (Valli, 1986). Management

techniques focus on implementing means to achieve the goals of the organization. Studies such as those done by Mintzberg (1975, in Pugh, 1984) show that managers work at an unrelenting pace, that their activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and discontinuity and that they are strongly oriented to action and dislike reflective activities.

As March (1986) explains, "the daily activities of a manager are rather distinct from grand conceptions of organizational leadership" (p. 22). The next section of the paper reviews the daily work of the principal to illustrate that within the context of the workplace, the duties of the principal are mainly those of management.

## The Work of the Principal: Leadership or Management?

Currently, when principals are asked what their educational role is, the general response is that they are instructional leaders (Cooper, 1989). The image of an effective principal emerging out of the effective school literature entwines the image of an effective principal with the role of instructional leader (Greenfield, 1988). Although the concept of a principal in the role of an instructional leader is presently receiving a lot of attention, exactly what being an instructional leader entails remains vague and ambiguous

(Murphy, 1988).

In much of the literature, instructional leadership refers to the principal's direct connection with classroom instruction, for example, visiting classrooms or providing teachers with informed pedagogical instruction. In fact, studies suggest that principals spend very little time working directly with teachers. Much research has been done to find out what principals actually do at work (Dwyer, 1985; Lightfoot, 1983; Lortie et al, 1983; Metz, 1978; Peterson, 1978; Wolcott, 1973). These studies indicate that the principal's work is largely social, occurs outside the classroom and involves mostly brief, interpersonal, face to face interactions with students, teachers, parents, superiors, and others. In general, principals spend most of their time responding to situational imperatives that require quick solutions. These situations, if left unattended to, have the potential to affect the status quo of the school situation (Greenfield, 1988). Thus, principals attempt to resolve every problem they encounter in their daily routines quickly and efficiently. In effect, every situation has priority.

Instructional leadership does not seem to be a role assumed by most principals and, in most schools, is not one that teachers want their principal to assume

(Ginsberg, 1988). Principals who interpret their role as instructional leaders to mean that they should spend more time working directly with teachers, "are likely to frustrate themselves and, indeed, may do their staffs and the children they serve a real harm" (Greenfield, 1988, p. 209).

Greenfield (1988) suggests that, "the call for more and better instructional leadership is a "prescription" that reflects virtually no understanding or recognition of the realities of the school work situation encountered by the principal" (p. 210). Because much of the research focusing on the role of principal as instructional leader has failed to study the constraints on principal behavior created by the organizational setting, the view of instructional leadership is very static and uniform (Murphy, 1988). Basically, what has been accomplished is that principal behaviors have been identified which are reported to improve teacher performance which, in turn, improves student achievement. Unfortunately, these same studies have led to the conclusion that, "instructional leadership behaviors that may be positively associated with organizational outcomes in one situation may have a neutral or negative relationship in another" (Murphy, p. 124). Thus, to understand the role of the

principalship, one must study this role within the context of the principal's working environment.

Renihan (1985) developed a formula for success in the principalship. He suggests that conviction + credibility + competence - constraint = effectiveness. Because the possiblity of removing the constraints from the work environments of principals is nil, this formula implies that principals are never effective. This is likely true only if the expectation is that a principal be both an educational leader and a manager. The following sections of this paper illustrate that principals can be effective as managers but that the constraints of the work environment limit their effectiveness as instructional leaders.

## The Mangement Role of the Principal

In a review of relevant research, Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) identified five clusters of situational obstacles which constrain a principal's actions. The five problem areas include problems related to teachers, to the role of principal, to those persons occupying the role of prinicpal, to board-level administration, and to the community. The remainder of this paper will use these problem areas as a framework to review the situational constraints in an attempt to

illustrate why the role of the principal is more appropriately one of management than one of instructional leadership.

Constraints from Teachers

In North American schools, teachers have almost total responsibility for classroom instruction. Because schools function as loosely coupled systems, the administrative hierarchy has, at best, very loose control over the technical core (Weick, 1976). Moreover, teachers tend to practice their profession in isolation. The work of one teacher has little effect on other teachers. In general, teachers' efforts are directed toward their individual students and not to the school as a whole. The situation dictates that principals work with each teacher individually. Interactions between teachers and principals rarely involve instruction directly. They are more apt to involve student discipline, resource allocation, or district and school policies. Teachers expect principals to buffer them from issues that are not directly associated with instruction. In other words, teachers look to principals to manage their work environment (initiating structure) (Kunz & Hoy, 1976; Hoy & Brown, 1988). They rarely seek advice from their

principals in instructional or curricular matters.

As an increasing number of teachers have more academic training in instruction and more expertise in specific curriculum areas than their principals, principals can hardly be expected to offer instructional guidance to these teachers. Generally, when teachers need advice in instructional or curricular areas, they seek the aid of their colleagues rather than their principals (Ginsberg, 1988; Pitner, 1986). The instructional role of principals appears to be more important in elementary schools than in high schools, but, generally, it refers to supervising teachers, particularly new teachers, and ensuring that provincial curricula are adhered to (Bezeau, 1989).

Constraints from the Principal's Role

A school administrator's role is most often viewed as a science of control whose function lies primarily in managing an organization in the most efficient manner (Foster, 1988). The daily demands placed on a principal are frequent and varied and require immediate, reactive responses if he/she is to maintain control. A principal's typical day consists of unexpected interruptions, noninstructional needs of teachers, organizational maintenance, and discipline problems, as

well as frequent administrative meetings with superiors, parents, support staff and others. There is little time in the daily routine for either reflective thought or instructional leadership.

Basically, principals respond to the changing needs of the work situation. These daily activities are routine and are "rather distinct from the grand conceptions of organizational leadership" (March, 1986, p. 22). Much of the traditional work of school leadership has focused on staff development, on ways of motivating teachers, and, generally, on staff moral. Slater and Jameson (1988) state that, "contrary to much of the conventional school-leadership literature, student achievement is neither necessarily helped or hurt by staff moral. More influential may be the mundane decisions (of principals - writer's addition)" (p. 299), the decisions made to manage the school environment.

Duke (1987) identifies seven situations that 'instructional leaders' must be prepared to deal with: teacher supervision and development, teacher evaluation, instructional management and support, resource management, quality control, coordination and troubleshooting. Over all, the duties of supervising, developing, evaluating, managing, supporting,

controlling, coordinating, and troubleshooting, identified as skills necessary for 'instructional leadership', are the basic management skills of the business world. While Duke uses the term 'instructional leader', the skills he includes reflect the expectation that principals acquire skills to help them organize and control the school environment. The skills that he states as necessary for instructional leadership are simply the skills of management.

A much contested role of principals is the role of teacher evaluator. Because of the lack of codified knowledge about what constitutes effective teaching practice, teachers and principals confront a normatively complex situation characterized by competing and sometimes conflicting standards of good practice (Greenfield, 1988). To add to this already difficult situation, most principals have little or no training in evaluation or observation techniques. Too often, teacher evaluations consist of a 'just like me' norm. Berry & Ginsberg (1988) found that teachers feel strongly that a role of instructional leader cannot have the responsibility for teacher evaluation as well. Ginsberg states, "the teachers claimed that faculty would be reluctant to open up and discuss problems with someone who was to evaluate their job performance" (p.

288). The role of evaluator definitely implies a management function. This evaluative role may be the most influential inhibitor to principals functioning as instructional leaders.

Constraints from the Characteristics of Principals

The dominant values of most administrators are keeping their schools running smoothly and communicating loyalty to superiors (Greenfield, 1988). A desire to maintain a stable environment and to avoid conflict makes most principals unwilling to implement change. Thus, most principals assume the management role of maintaining the status quo.

Like teachers, principals work autonomously. The connection between a school and district office is 'loosely coupled'. Moreover, what happens in one school has little effect on any other school. Thus, principals are primarily concerned with the performance of their own individual schools. Principals have few assistants nor, in most cases, do they have working relationships with other principals. Leithwood and Montgromery (1984) found that principals in their study were almost unanimous in their belief in the importance of a vice-principal to share administrative tasks, discuss school problems, and assist in planning. Prinicpals,

"spoke of feeling isolated in their role and of the contribution a vice-principal makes in reducing that feeling" (p. 84).

Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) also found that superintendents in their study perceived that, in general, principals lacked both the knowledge and the skills to improve educational programs. There is no evidence that principals are required to be effective teachers themselves (Ginsberg, 1988). Moreover, students in educational administration rarely receive any training in instructional areas. Administrative training programs include courses patterned after business and law that focus on management and control of personnel and resources. Few principals have graduate courses in the areas of curriculum, instruction or educational philosophy. Educational administration courses focus almost exclusively on developing management skills.

However, principals view themselves as instructional leaders. Thus, it could be surmised that principals themselves believe that they were promoted to a principalship because they exhibited superior teaching ability. However, if teachers do not share this belief, and most indications are that they do not, it becomes impossible for principals to be effective instructional

leaders.

Constraints from Board-level Administration.

Education exists in the political arena. Principals are governed by rigid and time-consuming policies and procedures that are developed to reflect the political interests of the school board. Because the mandate of school boards deals primarily with resource allocation and policy formulation in areas other than curriculum and instruction (curriculum is controlled by provincal governments), principals become implementors of policies that have a management focus, primarily that of control. In general, school boards view principals as plant managers. This view is manifest in the current philosophy in provinces such as British Columbia that have removed school site administrators from the teachers' union. The separation of school administrators from the teachers' union may signify that school administrators are expected to be school site managers who need not identify with teaching or teachers.

Principals in a study done by Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) identified a relatively high degree of difficulty with school boards in the following areas: failure to provide adequate resources, failure to

provide time for curriculum work, insufficient support services, and the requirement that principals evaluate teachers. Superintendents in this study expressed the concern that school boards' reward structures discourage principals from program implementation tasks and from acting as sources of inspiration for teachers in curriculum-related tasks. Thus, it would seem that school boards do not expect their principals to assume an instructional leadership role.

Senior administrators in the Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) study believed that, in general, principals' lack of skills in the following areas served as obstacles to effective program implementation: time management, organization, communication, decision-making, problem solving, budgeting, curriculum and implementation. These skills reflect the management emphasis that superintendents put on school administrators. This suggests that, basically, superintendents want their principals to have management skills.

## Constraints from the Community

As Greenfield (1988) states, "schools are under attack, reflect a culture built on a history of vulnerability to the public, and are not very secure environments" (p. 211). As the public's demand for educational accountability continues to grow, principals are required to spend more of their time negotiating with interest groups outside the school. The current move to include parents and the business community in education, in many cases, leaves little time for the principal to attend to the internal environment of the school. The need to manage the external environment as well as the internal environment requires that principals develop additional skills in negotiation, communication, and conflict resolution. This increasing demand for external involvement is far removed from the concept of instructional leadership.

## Implications

In summary, the demands of the principalship are varied and numerous. In a routine work day, principals must attempt to satisfy the needs of students, teachers, support staff, parents, community members, superiors and others. In most schools, principals do get the job done effectively but rarely in the manner portrayed by the

literature. They simply do the best they can to meet the constant demands of the work situation. They manage.

The role of the principal can be best understood within the context of the school environment. He/she must make decisions within the constraints inherent in that environment. Basically, the situational constraints imposed by teachers, by the role of the prinicpal, by persons in such roles, by the board and the superintendent, and by the community (including the students) makes the role of the prinicpal more appropriately one of management than one of instructional leadership.

Unfortunately, due to the controversial debates that have developed among educational administrative scholars, a negative connotation has become associated with the concept of managing. To manage is bad. To lead is good. In reality, teachers and students need principals to effectively and efficiently manage the work place. To provide an effective learning environment for numerous students does not happen in a state of chaos. It does not happen without a principal who has conviction, credibility, and competence. Someone must organize the environment and that is the role of the prinicpal. Without timetabling, budgeting,

communicating with parents, disciplining students, managing resources and so on, schools could not function. Effectiveness and efficiency are part of an effective school organization. Teachers today are better trained. As the sense of professionalism grows within the teaching ranks, teachers do not need principals to be directly involved in instructional areas, but they do need someone to coordinate and manage the work place. Thus, the negative connotation of principals as managers needs to be re-thought.

Principals do make a difference. Principals do contribute substantively to the success of their schools. However, the increased number of newspaper advertisements for school principals may be an indication that the job has become too demanding. It is time that principals, superintendents, school board members, and educational scholars review the role of the principal within the context of the current work situation. The concept of prinicpals as instructional leaders, in light of today's school work situation, is a role that is simply dysfunctional.

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